6 HISTORY OF HAMPTON

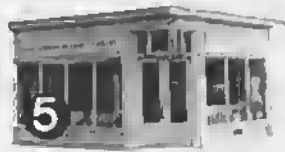**some of the places shown on the map at left**

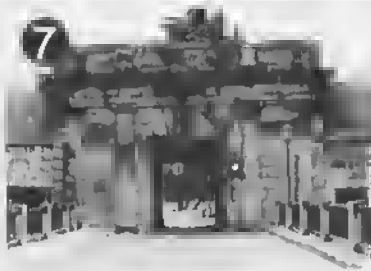From the moment in 1607 when the English colonists first sighted the New World and landed near the site of the present-day Veterans Administration Hospital, the City of Hampton has played an important role in both Virginia and American history.

Jamestown, settled in 1607, was abandoned late in the 17th century, but the Hampton area had inhabitants steadily from 1610 to the present. Therefore, Hampton is the oldest continuous English-speaking settlement in the New World.

The town was established on July 9, 1610 when Sir Thomas Gates drove the Kecoughtan Indians from their village near what is now Strawberry Banks. Gate's men built two forts on opposite sides of Hampton Creek. Settlers came to the area from Jamestown, and by 1619 John Rolfe could write that "At Kecoughtan are twenty persons whereof eleven are Farmers. Captain George Webb Commander, Mr. William Mays Minister there." The presence of the minister at that early date makes the parish at "Kecoughtan" the oldest Anglican parish in America.

The Hampton of today was originally part of Elizabeth Cittie Corporation, later called a shire and still later a county. It included all of today's Hampton, Phoebus, Poquoson, Newport News, Langley Air Force Base, Fort Monroe and much of Namsemond County. The settlement was first called Kecoughtan but in 1619 William Tucker and William Capps, the area's delegates to the first Virginia Assembly, presented a petition to "change the savage name of Kiccowtan, and to give that Incorporation a new name". The name choosen was Elizabeth City, after the daughter of King James I of England.

In early land grants the town of Hampton was called "Southampton on the Southampton River" It had been named for Henry Wriothelsey (pronounced "Risley") who became treasurer of the Virginia Company, which sent the English colonists to America.

Seafood quickly became popular, and the area was on its way as "Crab Town". William Strachey wrote in 1612 that king crabs at Southampton "are taken in shoal waters from off the shore a dozen at a time, hanging upon one anothers tail; they are a foot in length and half a foot in bredth".

When the General Assembly, acting upon instructions from London ordered towns to be established in Virginia, Hampton was already a growing, lively community. By 1698 it had been divided into half acre lots. Twenty six of those had been purchased by sea captains, merchants, inn-keepers, professional men and tradesmen. The town had been, and was still known by a variety of names, which included "Hampton", "Southampton", "Elizabeth City", and "Kicoughtan". William Byrd II, for example, consistently called the place "Kiquotan" in his famous *Secret Diary* written between 1709 and 1712. It appears that the city had almost as many names as there were spellings of the word "Kicoughtan".

During the entire colonial period, Hampton was a principal port of entry. It became a lively tavern town, busy with the activities of seamen, shipwrights, carpenters, and grog sellers. Merchants did a thriving business. Shiploads of goods were imported into Hampton from world centers of trade.

But the town did not consist entirely of ships and saloons. The oldest continuous English settlement boasted another "first": its free public school system. In 1634 Benjamin Syms, willed "two hundred Acres of land Lying in the Old Poquoson River and Eight Milch Cows... the said Land with the Milk and Increase Mail of the said Cattle to be for the Mantinence of an honest Learned Man to keep upon the said Ground a free school." This land is now part of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration area at Langley Air Force Base. And in 1659 Thomas Eaton left five hundred acres of land for

the same purpose. Eaton also provided "Twelve cows and two bulls, Twenty hogs, young and old, one bedstead, a table, a cheese press, Milk Pailes, water tubbs and powdering tubbs." Eaton's land encompassed a large area in the vicinity of present-day Pine Chapel Road and Salters Creek Road. Syms' and Eaton's generosity established the first free schools in America.

The thriving port town had 100 houses, plus a population of 1,250 in the early 1700's and pirates were attracted to the area to prey upon the richly stocked ships.

Peter Heyman, the British customs official in Hampton, was killed in April, 1700 while battling the pirate ship *La Paix* in Lynnhaven Bay near present-day Little Creek in Norfolk. He is buried within the enclosures which marks the third site of the Elizabeth City Parish Church on present-day Pembroke Avenue.

However, the pirate who would be most intimately associated with Hampton was Edward Teach or Thatch, better known as "Blackbeard". Little is known of Teach's early life. He was probably born in Bristol, England and he first went to sea as a deck hand on a privateer. In 1716, the pirate chief, Benjamin Hornigold, gave him command of a sloop and Teach was launched on his two-year career in crime.

In May, 1717, Blackbeard and other buccaneers blocked the entrance to the Virginia Capes. Incoming ships could not dock at Hampton without first paying the pirates. British warships drove them from the Capes, but Blackbeard continued plundering off the North Carolina coast.

Carolina citizens asked Governor Alexander Spotswood of Virginia to assist them in driving Blackbeard from the area.

Governor Spotswood hired two sloops at his own expense. They were manned by British sailors. On November 17, 1718 these sloops commanded by Lieutenant Robert Maynard left Hampton to find and destroy Edward Teach's "nest of pyrates".

On November 21, Maynard discovered Blackbeard's eight gun sloop in Ocracoke Inlet on the North Carolina coast. A battle began in which Blackbeard and nine of his sailors were killed. The British lost eleven and had twenty-four wounded.

When Lieutenant Maynard returned to Hampton, he brought the severed head of Edward Teach. This trophy was placed on a tall pole and displayed in Hampton, south of Sunset Creek near the end of present-day Ivy Home Road.

Hampton's importance as a port was clearly shown on February 19, 1755 when General Edward Braddock landed there. Braddock commanded the British forces in America during the early part of the French and Indian War. The General rode to Williamsburg at once to confer with the Governor of Virginia but a Mrs. Browne, the sister of one of Braddock's commissary officers had dinner in Hampton and wrote a brief description of the town; "My Brother and self went on shore to Hampton In the Pilots Boat... Went to the Kings Arms and breakfasted. Walk'd till Dinner,

A very agreeable Place, and all the Houses extreemly neat. Had for Dinner a Ham & Turkey, a Breast of Veal & Oysters, to drink Madeira Wine, Punch, and Cyder. Stay'd till 4 in the Afternoon and then went on Board..."

General Braddock was greeted by a cannon salute fired by John Hunter. Hunter later lived at "Little England", a large plantation near the site of the present-day Yacht Club. A cannon has been mounted near the front of the Club to commemorate Braddock's landing.

Revolutionary War

In 1775 when the Revolutionary War began, cannons again played a part in Hampton's history but they were not used for ceremonial salutes.

Captain Matthew Squire, commander of the British sloop *Otter*, prowled the Hampton area with his ship and seized livestock, poultry, and Negro slaves. When the *Otter* was driven into Back River by a storm on September 5, 1775, angry Hampton citizens burned one of the small boats attached to the *Otter*. The crew was not harmed but Squire demanded the return of spoils taken from the tender. The Patriots ignored Squire's request, and therefore, on October 24, the captain returned to Hampton with six armed ships.

He began a cannonade of the town and attempted to put troops ashore, at the foot of South King Street. But Hampton minutemen commanded by Francis Eppes plus a company of Virginia Continentals fired from the houses

on shore and drove the invaders back to their ships.

Hampton had requested aid from Williamsburg and when Squire returned to renew the fight on the 25th he faced 100 mounted riflemen from Culpepper, sent from Williamsburg. The British were again repulsed. There were no casualties among the Virginia troops but Squire's cannonade damaged St. John's Church.

After Squire's attack only a few small skirmishes occurred near Hampton until 17B1, the last year of the war. On March B of that year, Lieutenant-Colonial Thomas Dundas of His Majesty's Army, decided to attack an American outpost at Halfway House, near present-day Tabb. Dundas, on the night of March 7, 17B1, landed 200 infantry and cavalry near the site where the National Aeronautics and Space Administration stands today. They marched to the Halfway House, but the Americans had abandoned the post. Dundas then turned southward toward Newport News Point where his ships were anchored.

Somewhere near the site of present-day Big Bethel Battlefield Park, forty members of the Virginia Militia commanded by Colonel W. R. W. Curle and Colonel Francis Mallory battled the British. The Virginians fought bravely but they were outnumbered and therefore retreated. Colonel Mallory, however, continued to fight the advancing British alone and was killed. This was the last skirmish of the American Revolution fought near Hampton.

Hampton's famous Revolutionary War statesman was George Wythe, who was born in 1726 on his father's plantation "Chesterville" on Back River. Wythe was the first professor of law at the College of William and Mary (oldest law school in America), taught Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and designed the Great Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia. His home stood on land now occupied by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Two of the town's Revolutionary War heroes were Blacks. One was a ship's pilot, Cesar, who took the name of his owners, Carter and Mary Tarrant. The Commonwealth of Virginia purchased Cesar's freedom as a reward for his wartime services. Tarrant bought a town lot near today's Settler's Landing Road and arranged for his family's freedom. The City of Hampton recently named a new school in Tarrant's honor.

The other notable Black was Joe Ranger, a seaman who served aboard the brig *Jefferson*. After the Revolution, Ranger purchased farm land in what is today the Southampton section of town. Like Tarrant, Joe Ranger also purchased his family's freedom.

The Syms School and the Eaton School deteriorated after the Revolution. By 1803 complaints had arisen and a petition was sent to the Virginia Assembly asking for comsolidation of the two schools and requesting (if the schools were consolidated) that the new single school be built within the City of Hampton.

The citizens insisted that the location of the schools outside the town was inconvenient. "An Academy might

as well be established in Kentucky as at Hampton if those poor children cannot repair there for to receive their education." They also protested that "the limited income of these Lands is not an object sufficient to induce a Man of Literature to take charge of the schools and it is a very natural conclusion that when man are badly paid for services they are indifferently rendered..."

On January 12, 1B05 the Assembly authorized the sale of the Syms and Eaton properties and appointed trustees to establish a new school in Hampton. This school was called "Hampton Academy" and it stood on Cary Street near downtown Hampton. The names of Syms and Eaton were not used in connection with the new school, although funds from the sale of their lands maintained it.

The new Hampton Academy had hardly opened its doors when it fell victim to wartime plundering by hostile invaders. In 1812 the United States declared war against England, and on June 22, 1B13, British Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren and Rear Admiral Sir George Cockburn attempted an invasion of Norfolk. The Americans, however, drove the British landing party back to their ships, sinking Admiral Warren's barge in the process. This defeat infuriated Warren and Cockburn and they looked for another site to land their troops and to put into practice their policy of "plundering and ruining the pesantry". The spot they selected was Hampton.

The citizens of Hampton were aware of the presence of the British in the area and efforts had been made to fortify the town. A garrison was stationed at Little England Plantation near the site of the present-day John M. Willis School, while artillery pieces were placed on the opposite sides on Sunset Creek to guard the entrance into Hampton.

On the night of June 24, 1813 the British landed soldiers and Marine at Indian River near the vicinity of present-day Harbor Drive. They began their march inland and at dawn they halted for breakfast probably near the spot where Hampton General Hospital stands today. Here they were discovered and troops were sent to stop them. The Americans, however, were brushed aside and the British continued their march toward the town, following the route of present-day Victoria Boulevard.

Meanwhile at Hampton, Admiral Sir George Cockburn landed infantry, artillery, marines, and French prisoners from Napoleon's army, (who were serving with the British in America to provide extra manpower). They swarmed through the unresisting town and during the next two days, June 26 and 27, the invaders looted Hampton.

The British made no effort to deny that atrocities were committed. Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Napier, who commanded the troops that defeated the Americans, stated that "Every horror was committed with impunity—rape, murder, pillage, and not a man punished." Most of the blame for the vandalism was heaped upon the French prisoners. Napier called them "the greatest rascals existing" and stated that "I wished to shoot some, but had not opportunity. They really murdered without any object but the pleasure of murdering." These men were

dismissed from the British Army after the attack upon Hampton.

The news of these atrocities inflamed the Americans since much vandalism was, indeed, committed by the British, although it appears that only one citizen was killed. "Hampton exhibits a dreary and desolate appearance," stated a visitor to the town.

The United States won the War of 1B12, but what happened at Hampton was not forgotten. The ease with which the British were able to occupy the town demonstrated the area's vulnerability.

Therefore, a commission of army and navy officers was appointed to select coastal sites to be fortified, should another invading army arrive. One of the sites selected was Old Point Comfort and in March, 1819 the construction of Fort Monroe, named for President James Monroe, began.

Work progressed slowly and the fort was not finished until 1B34. During its early years, famous Americans were stationed there. Young Robert E. Lee, a lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers, served at Fort Monroe from 1B31 to 1B34. Edgar Allan Poe, age twenty, was the sergeant-major of the 1st Artillery Regiment at the fort from January, 1B29 until April when he purchased his discharge by finding a substitute to serve the remainder of his enlistment. Despite legends to the contrary, Poe was an excellent soldier and he obtained letters of commendation from his officers, including the Fort's commander, when he left the service.

Sergeant-Major Poe probably visited Hampton during one of the long walks he enjoyed taking. In order to cross Hampton River into town (where the Queen Street Bridge stands today) he would have hailed a ferry, for a bridge was not built at that site until 1B34. Another modern addition was a steamboat which appeared at Hampton wharf in 1B4B to carry passengers and freight.

By 1860 Hampton had a population of 2,560. There were two hotels, two drug stores, two clothing stores, two hardware stores and two butcher shops. There were several saloons and many livery stables. Wheat fields grew beside King Street and the postmaster, William Massenburg, stuck letters in his hat and handed them out as he strolled along Queen Street. One year later, this slow-paced quiet era ended when Virginia seceded from the Union and the Civil War began.

Civil War

Fort Monroe was one of the first strongholds in the South to be seized by the Union Army. After occupying the fort, the Federals marched into Hampton on May 23, 1B61 and halted at the intersection of King and Queen Streets. This demonstration, according to Confederate Major John B. Cary, "seemed at first to wear a very ugly aspect, but which, happily, resulted in no damage, save the alarm of our women and children and the excitement of our citizens". Major Cary and Union Colonel J. W. Phlips agreed not to fight and the Union troops marched across the Queen Street Bridge to Fort Monroe. They left Hampton unmolested.

On the same day that the troops confronted each other, three slaves from Hampton sought refuge at Fort Monroe. Union generals elsewhere had been turning away escaped slaves or allowing their owners to repossess them. General Benjamin Butler, however, kept the Negroes and put them to work.

Their owner, Colonel Charles K. Mallory of Hampton sent Major John B. Cary to demand their return under the Fugitive Slave Law. General Butler, who was a lawyer in civilian life, refused to surrender the fugitives on the ground that they were "contraband of war". Major Cary contended that Butler had a constitutional obligation to return the escaped slaves. However, Butler replied that he was under no obligation to uphold the constitutional rights of citizens of a foreign country, which Virginia now claimed to be.

This news spread throughout the countryside and Fort Monroe was besieged by runaway slaves seeking admission to "the freedom fort". General Butler was ordered by the War Department to house and feed the escaped slaves and to put the able-bodied ones to work. Eventually the United States Government supported General Butler's unique legal interpretation, and other Union commanders were instructed to give refuge to runaway slaves. Such fugitives were thenceforth known as "contrabands", and for the first time, were paid wages for their work.

Burning of Hampton

In August 1B61, a story in the New York Times announced

that Butler planned to quarter escaped slaves and Union soldiers in Hampton. Therefore, General John B. Magruder, Confederate commander on the Virginia Peninsula decided to burn the town. The date selected was August 7 and Captain Jefferson C. Phillips, a native of Hampton, was given this disagreeable assignment. Phillips commanded the Old Dominion Dragoons, a cavalry company composed of young men from the town.

A correspondent from the Philadelphia Inquirer at Fort Monroe watched the fire from the Queen Street Bridge and later wrote: "House after house and building after building melted like wax, and threw a lurid glare up to the sky. A long heavy line of clouds floated away toward the Fortress as if crying for help for the poor village...This forenoon I visited the spot again. Nothing but walls of brick houses tottering and cooling in the wind, scorched and seared trees, and heaps of smoldering ruins mark the site. A more desolate sight cannot be imagined than is Hampton today. Last evening it was one of the most beautiful villages on the continent."

Hampton was still desolate in May, 1B62 when President

Abraham Lincoln arrived at Fort Monroe for a conference concerning the offensive operations of the Union Army. The President, with Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, rode into Hampton and down Queen Street to see the blackened walls of St. John's Church.

The town, however, made a quick comeback after the war. The residents returned and business revived. Only one year after Lee's surrender Hampton boasted a "Cosmopolitan Hotel, situated in the center of town. Good rooms and good beds. The Bar contains the choicest of Ales, Wines, Liquors, Segars and Tobacco". At Glover and Tuck's Restaurant on Queen Street "you can get a snack in the shape of an Oyster stew, raw or fry, Steak and Ham and Eggs at all hours. They have also put up a new Bagatelle table". And J. Thanhouser and Sons offered "Coats, Pants, Shirts, Vests and Drawers of all description which can be bought cheaper than any other place in Hampton".

Northern capital helped the town prosper. James Sands Darling, a New Yorker, settled in Hampton in October, 1866. He first established a large sawmill which was successful and in 1881 he became Hampton's leading

Photo taken in 1862 when President Lincoln visited Hampton

60

Oyster tycoon, Harrison Phoebus, a Baltimore boy, was made agent of the Adams Express Company at Fort Monroe in May, 1866. Phoebus became manager of the Hygeia Hotel (located on the site of the present day Chamberlin Hotel) in 1864. The Hygeia became one of the most famous hotels in the country, attracting prominent persons from the entire nation.

At the outbreak of the Civil War thousands of reinforcements were rushed to Fort Monroe, and the overflow was sent to Mill Creek where Camp Hamilton was established. In 1871 the land where the camp stood was devided into building lots and sold. The streets were named after prominent citizens of the time: Mellen, Howard, Armistead, Segar, Libbey, Mallory, Hope, Curry and Willard. The community then took the name of Chesapeake City.

In 1881 the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway extended its line from Richmond to Newport News, and in 1882 the line was extended from Newport News to Chesapeake City. Because Harrison Phoebus played a prominent part in bringing this about, the railroad station was named Phoebus, Virginia. The name of the post office was also changed to Phoebus.

However, both names, Chesapeake City and Phoebus, competed with one another during the rest of the century. In 1900, fifteen years after the death of Harrison Phoebus, the community was incorporated as a town under the name of Phoebus. It enjoyed the status of a separate municipality until 1952 when it became part of

the City of Hampton.

Unlike James Darling and Harrison Phoebus, Samuel Chapman Armstrong was more interested in education than in business. Armstrong had commanded 8lack troops during the Civil War and this experience proved to him, as he later wrote, "the excellent qualities and capacities of the freedmen". In 1868 he established the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Instutute which, he stated, "would train selected Negro youth who should go out and teach and lead their people". This was the beginning of Hampton Institute which, in 1B68 had thirty students and eight teachers. Today it is an outstanding educational institution with a student body of 2,600 students and 231 faculty members, offering BA and 8S degrees and a MA in Education.

Fire in 1884

Another exciting event which took place in Hampton between Lee's surrender and the turn-of-the-century was the fire of 1BB4. It began at dawn on April 9th in Bridgeman's harness shop on West Queen Street, opposite St. John's Church. Missing the church, the flames jumped to the north side of Queen and raced eastward, burning everything on both sides of the street. The fire was stopped at the corner of King and Queen Streets but not before businesses on the west side of South King Street (up to the site of the present-day Wyatt Brothers Store) were destroyed.

Hampton had no fire department and the blaze was

61

battled by firemen from Hampton Institute and from the National Soldiers Home. A Volunteer Fire Company of twenty members was organized immediately after the fire. They solicited donations from door to door and obtained enough money to purchase a small hand drawn, hand pumped fire engine.

By 1900, Hampton (although somewhat larger in population than in 1860 and with prosperous crab and oyster "factories") was, a resident remembered, "a nice quiet place in which to live". There were no telephones and no gas service. There were no autos and no paved streets. Five or six large stones were placed in Queen Street, upon which the ladies would pick their way through the mud.

Langley Field

Perhaps the date of December 30, 1916 might be considered the end, forever, of slow-paced living in Hampton. For on that date the United States purchased 1,659 acres on the southwest branch of Back River for what was called an "Aviation Experimental Station and Proving Ground". This, stated the *Hampton Monitor* was the "Biggest thing for Hampton that has occurred since the location of the Newport News Shipyard".

The Monitor was right. On August 7, 1917, the "Experimental Station" was officially christened Langley Field. It became one of the most important air bases in the country and today it is the headquarters of the Tactical Air Command. In 1958 a "Space Task Group" was activated
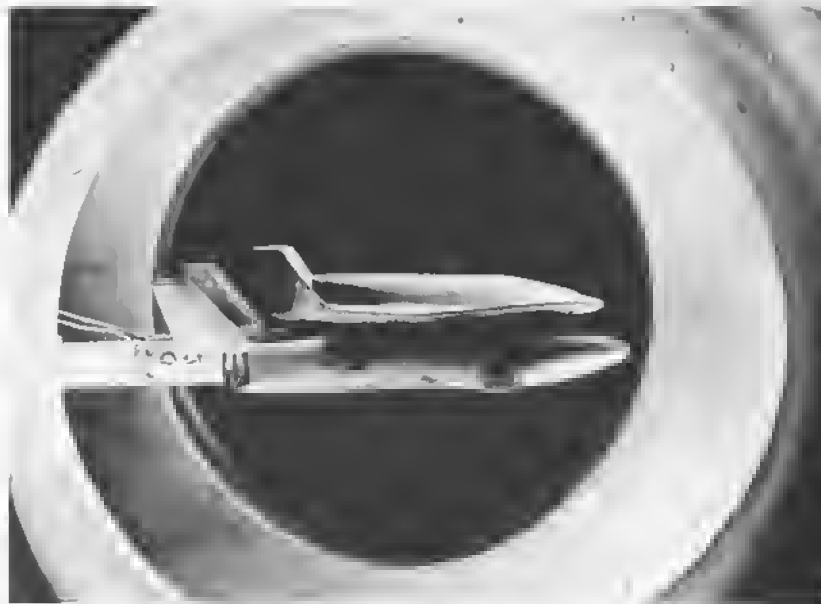
A proposed model of the Space Shuttle being tested in one of Langley Research Center's wind tunnels.

there which picked the first famous "original seven" astronauts: Carpenter, Cooper, Glenn, Grissom, Shirra, Shepard, and Slayton, who trained at Langley.

Therefore, Hampton entered the space age and today it is a vibrant, ever-growing community. Those who live here experience the "Hampton Spirit", the All America City award winning spirit. **"Out of the Past-The Future"** is the city's motto and today's Hampton citizen plans for the future, while being ever aware of the city's colorful, significant Past.